No. 41. On the entrance to a Cure, or otherwise.

RR

2d Corin. 4th Chap. 5th Verse.

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus's sake.

That the Gospel of Jesus Christ might overspread the whole earth, and its blessings be communicated "to every creature," its divine Author appointed and ordained those "whom He had chosen," to be the instruments of accomplishing this important work. In them He vested the power of ordaining others, that "His Church might never want a supply of fit "and able men, qualified to perform the arduous but "honorable task of reconciling men to God"—men who were to preach not themselves, not their own fancies and conceits, but Christ Jesus the Lord, the doctrines contained in the Evangelical Covenant, and become the servants of the Church for Jesus's sake. In the infancy of the Gospel they had not only to contend with the prejudices and passions of mankind—not only to oppose the religious tenets of the several countries through which they passed, but to submit with patience,

and endure with firmneſs, the exemplary vengeance denounced by the civil power. They, like the Prophets of old time, "had trial of cruel mockings and "" ſcourgings, yea moreover of bonds and impriſon- " ments; they were ſtoned, were ſawn aſunder, were " tempted, were ſlain with the ſword"—Thanks be to God we are not proved in this furnace of affliction! Our duty is to undertake the care of a certain diſtrict, in which, in very populous places excepted, we may know, and be known to, each individual in it. As this is the relation which now, my brethren, ſubſiſts betwen us, [and as I have ſolemnly engaged "to " watch for your ſouls, as one that muſt give account]; " you will give me leave to lay before you what I conceive to be my duty, and to exhort you not to be backward in the diſcharge of yours.

The firſt duty I ſhall mention of a Pariſh Miniſter is, that he regularly preach the word, and duely adminiſter the Sacraments. Now no thinking man will attempt to perſuade himſelf that he diſcharges

his duty by merely reading to his hearers a cool lecture of morality—the end of preaching is to turn our hearers to righteousness. "As ambassadors of God, "we are to pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled "to God;" we are to be earnest and importunate with you, to forsake your sins and lead a new life; we are "to become your servants for Jesus's sake." But to preach with effect; to prevail with the drunkard to be sober—which is the great end of preaching;—with the swearer to "bless and curse not;" with the Sabbath-breaker to "worship the Lord in the great congregation; "with him that stole to steal no more;" to do this effectually implies that we are personally acquainted with our hearers. For unless we know their several dispositions and characters, it is impossible we should adapt judiciously and properly our discourses to their circumstances; and then, however excellent they may be, if they are not calculated for the wants of the hearers, they are like the best seed sown at an improper season, or in an unprepared soil.

To this reasoning one objection may at first sight present itself, which is, that each discourse will be levelled at some particular persons. In answer to this, is it likely that the man addicted to any prevailing vice should be reclaimed from it, if he does not hear the folly of it exposed, the danger of it threatened, the punishment of it denounced? Would the Minister, do you think, discharge his duty, if he did not expostulate with the sinner—if he did not set his vice in so odious, in so detestable a light, as to prevail with him, by the blessing of God accompanying the word, to cease from so absurd and sinful a practice? The man might say, perhaps, with some expressions of indignation, that the preacher had singled him out of the congregation—but his own conscience would tell him, that the minister had only done what it was his duty to do. The censure or the applause of such a man I should receive with equal indifference. Suppose that, either through fear or any other motive, the preacher of God's word should neglect "to warn the wicked from

"his way, and the wicked man should die in his "iniquity," when they meet at the day of judgment, could the minister then say that "he had watched for "his soul, as one that was to give account?" Could the minister then say that, in compliance with the obligations into which he had entered, "he had not "ceased, in season and out of season," to exhort him to relinquish a vice which would involve him in eternal ruin? And what does the Scripture say, will be his reception from God Almighty?—"the wicked man "has died in his iniquity; but his blood will I re= "quire at thine hand." As the physician observes the several stages of the disorder of his patient, and varies his medicines according to its progress or decline; so will the faithful minister of God administer "milk to "babes, and strong meat to those of riper years," con= sulting with watchful care how he can apply, to each of his hearers, the words of Nathan to David, "thou "art the man." On the other hand, what part does the minister of the Gospel act who suffers you to lose

your ſouls through neglect, or the fear of giving offence? Does ſuch an one fulfil the errand he was ſent upon? Is he faithful to his truſt? Let no man then take offence when he hears the Goſpel delivered with plainneſs: "it is better if thy right hand offend thee, "to cut it off and caſt it from thee, than that thy "whole body ſhould be caſt into Hell"—it is better you ſhould hear the truths of the Goſpel now, tho' they ſhould make your ears to tingle, than that you ſhould be tormented in the fire that never goes out, rather than your diſpleaſure ſhould be incurred.

[There are certain topics on which I ſhall not fail to urge you with peculiar earneſtneſs—and I pray God I may not urge you in vain! I ſhall moſt earneſtly exhort you to pray frequently in private to God the Author and giver of every good gift, and to aſſemble your families regularly every evening before you retire to reſt. Every man, I believe, who is influenced by the precepts of Chriſtianity, looks upon theſe duties as indiſpenſably neceſsary; the one, for the

support of his own soul; for prayer is as necessary for the comfort of a Christian's soul, as food is for the refreshment of his body; the other, for the example and edification of his family. And if you profit by the word spoken, "that your profiting may appear unto "all men," you will give this public testimony of it, you will live quietly and honestly with your neighbors, you will do unto all men as you would they should do unto you—you will regularly attend the Church, and invariably receive the Sacrament: for if the Church be not filled and the Altar crowded, it will be evident to God, to ourselves, and to the world, that both my preaching and your hearing are in vain. "My "heart's desire and prayer to God," is that when we stand, all, at the bar of Judgment, I may be able to address the Almighty, "Lord, of these committed to "my care not one is lost;" and may challenge you "as the crown of my rejoicing, and glory, and joy!"]

Some people are of opinion, that the Gospel is seldom delivered in its genuine purity in the Church,

and therefore, instead of attending its worship and service, go to other communions where they receive, or fancy they receive, more edification. If by attending a meeting composed of Dissenters or Methodists you are made better men than by going to Church; if you are better husbands, better fathers, better neighbors, better Christians; for to become such, I suppose, is your motive for going there—my advice is—" go, and the " Lord be with you!" I wish all well-disposed men, of whatever persuasion, " good luck in the name of the " Lord." But give me leave to add, if such teachers should be mistaken; if they should " deliver for doc- " trines the traditions of men;" if they should teach you to trust on a broken reed; if they should mislead you in so important a point as Salvation; how will you blame your obstinacy, your folly, your infatuation, in believing their doctrines without having strictly examined their truth, and fairly weighed their tendency? " Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits," with impartiality, " whether they be of God." A

regular minister can have no view in deceiving; it may indeed increase his popularity, but his stipend continues the same. Now it is not so with those "who go out from us, or with those who are not of "us." As their congregations increase their salaries in general, and their importance always, increase in proportion. Do not be so weak as to imagine, that because they may be followed by numbers, "they are, "therefore, of the truth." You observe in a market an impudent mountebank surrounded by a multitude, who listen with attention and admire with astonishment, but I am bold to say you cannot discover a man of real sound sense and penetrating judgment amongst the crowd. I wish to avoid giving every man offence; and if I do offend—"forgive me this wrong."

Besides preaching the word of God faithfully, every minister of a parish is to visit his congregation, and administer consolation to those oppressed with sickness, or bowed down with infirmity. Agreeable to the 67th Canon—"When any person is dangerously

" sick in any parish, the Minister or Curate, having " knowlege thereof, shall resort unto him, or her, to " instruct and comfort them in their distress." Believe me, Christians, to visit the sick is the most affecting, the most awful part of a Clergyman's duty. Can you conceive the agony of our minds when we visit any of our flock struck with sickness, and discover them totally ignorant of Religion, and uncertain of their salvation? The first thought of his mind is—can the ignorance of this poor wretch be attributed to his want of religious instruction? Is it owing to my neglect, that he knows so little the state of his soul? And should his sickness end in death, when the bell acquaints us, by its solemn toll, that his race is run, can we hear it, do you imagine, with unconcern? When we are assembled to perform the last sad office, and to lie him in his silent grave, we cannot help putting this awful question to ourselves—When I meet the soul which lately inhabited that breathless body, at the tribunal of God—shall I meet it with confidence

or with dismay? If it be received to happiness, am I the blessed instrument of its happiness? If it be doomed to misery, can its misery, either through neglect or inattention, be laid to my charge? For this soul I know I am to answer——can I appeal to God that, if it has perished, it has perished through its own fault?

But there are many other duties, which, tho' of an inferior nature, are indispensible. I will mention one which may deserve your attention. Through the indiscretion, intermedling, and misrepresentation of busy neighbors, differences and quarrels often arise, and sometimes get to so great a height as to divide a Town-ship or a Parish against itself, and sometimes can be no way settled without applying to the Civil Magistrate. Now to compose differences; to reconcile neighbors at variance; to establish peace and harmony in his Parish, is incumbent on every minister. I shall think my time usefully employed; I shall feel nothing a trouble, if I can prevent a quarrel, or settle a difference.

Nothing remains but that I make an applica-tion from what has been said.

If the minister be sent of God to preach His word, it is the duty of the people to be constant in hearing it. When the Sunday arrives, remember that God him-self requires you all to worship Him in His own house, and to meet together as one family, "as the "houshold of God." Let then neither indolence nor trifling engagements prevent your attendance. What hinders you often from attending the Church, does not hinder you from attending the market, and going to a greater distance, "to buy and sell and get gain." Remember, Christians, that by such conduct you are acting in defiance of God, that you are taking all the pains in your power to make God your enemy, to make Him your enemy "who can destroy both body "and soul in hell." "O come then to His gates with "thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise." — And when you are assembled, consider, that from what you hear and are prevailed on to practise, you

will be judged at the last day. Let me request of you "to hear the word with meekness, to receive it "with pure affection," that, by the increase of God's grace, you "may bring forth the fruits of good living." Do not condemn your minister with bitterness, or censure him with asperity, because he may not preach altogether what you think is to be found in the Gospel. The probability is that you are mistaken: perhaps you do not attend to, or may not comprehend the whole chain of his reasoning. "We preach not ourselves, "but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your ser= "vants for Jesus's sake. Woe be unto us if we "preach not the Gospel." To render the discourses you hear effectual to your salvation, beseech the Al= mighty to give you grace to "receive with meekness the "ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls." And, to use the language of the Apostle, "beseech "Him for me also, that utterance may be given unto "me, that I may open my mouth boldly, and speak "as I ought to speak." Be assured, my brethren,

that I on my part will never forget to " make men=
" tion of you always in my prayers to God for you
" all, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the
" Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit o
" wisdom, that ye may be full of goodness, filled with
" all knowlege, able also to admonish one another ;
" that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all
" pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and in=
" creasing in the knowledge of God—that your faith,"
your honesty, your integrity, your piety " may be
" spoken of" by all who know you ; then be our cir=
cumstances in this life what they may—however poor
and despised we may be—we shall have nothing to
fear—we shall be at peace with one another, with
ourselves, and with God.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

Theoph^s. J. St. John.